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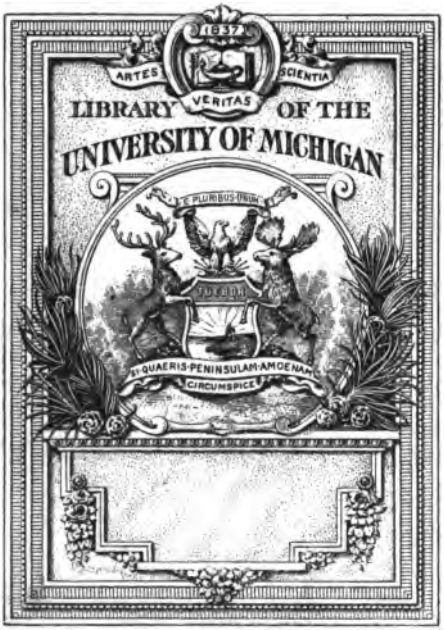
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VALLOMBROSA

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

VALLOMBROSA

BY

W. W. STORY

AUTHOR OF 'ROBA DI ROMA,' 'GRAFFITI D'ITALIA,'
'NERO,' ETC.

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VALLOMBROSA.

IN the latter part of last October I found myself in the lower slopes of the Apennines, on the shadowy hills of Vallombrosa. Its very name, which Milton has made familiar to English ears, has a poetic and romantic attraction; and whenever it is pronounced, there rises in the memory his famous simile of the innumerable legions of angelic forms

> "who lay entranced,
> Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
> In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades
> High overarched embower."

But of the many who know by heart these magical lines, how few there are to whom Vallom-

brosa is more than a sounding name—suggesting at best some vague place in the ideal realm of dreams, through whose dense Etrurian coverts of unnamed trees a fine poetic sunlight faintly shimmers, whose dim and shadowy paths and singing brooks are strewn by the ruffling winds of autumn with a wealth of innumerable leaves, and over which there hovers an undefined mysterious charm of unreality! Such at least it was to me before I visited it in the body. Nor did I find the dream those few lines had the power to evoke to my imagination, quite untrue to fact. Nothing could be more romantic, beautiful, and interesting in every way—whether sleeping and murmurous with whispers in the summer and autumn, with shadowy coverts for meditation, or rousing and wrestling with the storm-winds that descend upon it from the higher Apennines and assail its forests with their fury in the winter months. It is never tame or characterless, but silent, wild, lonely, secluded,

gentle, or furious, according to the mood of the season, and responsive to every touch of feeling and passion.

I had been invited by a friend to pass a few days with her and her family in one of the most lonely regions of the large tract which bears the name of Vallombrosa. The once famous convent lies at a distance of about three miles from this spot; and here, in one of the hollows, they had hired an old deserted house, built centuries ago by the Medici as a stronghold and hunting-box, which they had fitted up and put into habitable condition as a summer retreat from the heats of Florence. Originally the house was flanked by two tall towers, and was castellated in form; but within the last few years the present Government, caring little for the picturesque, and apparently seeking rather to obliterate than to preserve the traces of the past, had ruthlessly and for no sufficient reason levelled

the two towers and razed the upper storey: so that the house is now a square unpicturesque but solidly-built construction in stone, two storeys high, and with walls massive enough to resist the assault of anything but modern cannon. Here my friends had made their summer home, far from all society and neighbours, to enjoy freedom, solitude, and the silence and charm of nature. There is no highway to lead the wandering tourist to their doors, and only friends who are willing to brave a long romantic mountain-path practicable but to foot-passengers, or donkeys, or *treggie*, find their way to this solitary spot. These *treggie* are merely the rudest kind of sledge, made of two long solid planks, with a seat midway, which are trailed along the ground by patient slow-moving oxen. No carriage on wheels could possibly bear the shock and strain of these rough roads, if roads they can be called, which rather resemble the rock-strewn ways worn by mountain-torrents. So

one is not liable to morning calls in the latest of Worth's dresses, God be thanked; but the foot-passenger in stout boots and country dress is amply repaid for his walk, whether he come by the way of Podere Nuovo on the north, along a winding path through the woods, or by the monastery on the south, over a road commanding the loveliest and largest views over an exquisite and varied valley strewn with far-gleaming villages and towns, bounded by swelling outlines of hills or mountains, one rising after another against the delicate sky.

There, far away in the misty distance, can be seen the vague towers and domes of Florence; and through the valley the Arno and the Sieve wind like silver bands of light, through olive-covered slopes and vineyards that lie silent in the blue haze of distance, spotted by wandering cloud-shades, and taking every hue of changeful light from the pearly gleams of early morning

to the gorgeous golden transmutations of twilight and the deep intensity of moonlit midnight. Nearer, magnificent chestnuts throng the autumnal slopes, their yellow leaves glowing in the autumn sun. Sombre groves of firs, marshalled along the hillsides for miles, stand solemn and dark. Beech-trees rear at intervals their smooth trunks, or gather together in close and murmurous conclave. The lower growth of gorse, and broom, and brush, and feathered fern roughen the hills, where the axe has bereft them of their forest-growth; and in every direction are wild enchanting walks through light and shadow, alluring us on and on for miles. Here and there columns of wavering blue smoke tower and melt away into the blue sky, where the charcoal-burners are at work. Little brooks come trickling down at intervals, finding their devious way among the rocks and leaves, and singing to themselves a low and silvery song. Now and then a partridge whirs up beneath

your feet, or a whistling woodcock suddenly takes flight, or a startled hare with up-cocked tail may be seen tilting through the underbrush, or a sly fox steals cautiously away.

These foxes, which are very numerous, are the bane of the place. They destroy the ground game; and as it would not be possible to hunt them with hounds over this wild and rugged country, they are here merely a pest, and hateful to sportsmen. Were it not for them and poachers (who, indeed, are comparatively few), the game ought to be most abundant; for the whole country is Government property, fairly well preserved by the forest-guards, and none but a privileged few are permitted to shoot over it.

Small birds, however, of every kind abound, and the woods are musical all the spring and early summer with their happy song. Here at Vallombrosa itself they are protected against their bitterest enemy, man, and from the unsportsman-like devices of net and snare, which

are prevalent elsewhere throughout Italy. But on the confines these are freely practised; and the Government grants to a very limited extent, and for the small annual tax of fifteen francs, the right of snaring by means of the *paretaio*, as it is called. This is a long, low, narrow erection, some six feet high in front, and covered with a roof sloping down to the ground behind. The front is pierced with slits for outlook; and within, the sportsmen, if they are to be honoured by such a name, hide themselves. It is placed generally on open ground, with a square open space before it, so as to be exposed to the sight of all birds. In this space a number of caged singing-birds are set at intervals, to attract by their song all other wandering birds. On either side of this square extends flat along the ground a framed net, concealed often by brushwood and seeded plants, and connected with the inside of the *paretaio* with cords, by which they are worked. Attracted by the murmur and flutter

of the caged birds, gradually all the others in the vicinity gather about the place and descend to the ground—curious, apparently, to investigate the meaning of this strange construction, and to make inquiries. When a sufficient number are thus inveigled, the cords are suddenly drawn, and the nets shut instantly together over the space, entrapping the poor unfortunates. Sometimes in one of these *paretaii* a hundred little birds will be taken in a day; and whatever they are, large or small, they go to the spit or the pan, and find a place on the table.

Formerly, the snare and net were universal in Italy, and all along the coast, in the season of flight; quails were thus taken by tens of thousands as they alighted weary with their long flight from Africa. But of late the present Government has strictly prohibited this practice, and now they are only allowed to be shot in a sportsmanlike manner. Still, in the inland, netting and snaring are almost universal; and

everything is considered fair game, from the smallest sparrow to the pheasant and wild duck.

But at Vallombrosa, despite these snares, the woods are enlivened by the song of many a bird in summer: and now, in the mid-autumn, they still echo to the shrill scolding of the jay; the piping of the thrush, blackbird, and chaffinch; and the cheeping notes and trills of the lesser tribes. Squirrels swing from bough to bough, and run up the tall trunks. Grasshoppers flutter about, and, spreading their gay shards, show the gleam of blue wings beneath. And there is busy insect-life swarming, buzzing, and whispering everywhere in the woods. If one could only know what they are saying!

"To one who has been much in city pent" it is a pure delight, on bright autumnal days in late October, to wander through the woods and along the hillsides of Vallombrosa, vaguely,

without object, dreaming, listening, at one with nature; now climbing through the tangled gorse, up steep rugged declivities, or lingering where the roaring torrent dashes down its turbulent sheets of foam; now following the track of some mountain stream through beech-groves; now lying at rest under some golden chestnut—whose spiny burrs, showing the dark and polished nuts within their cloven husk, strew the rough grass underneath; now lingering to gaze out over the rolling distance below, so silent and lovely; now treading the brown soft carpet beneath the tall columnal firs, whose serried masts rise thickly, climbing to the light, and swaying to the breeze, and whispering to it unimaginable secrets beyond our sense to catch.

On either side of the house are silent cathedrals of firs, into which one can enter almost with a step. The summer sun pierces not through their summits; but all is cool and shadowy, and filled with a sort of dim religious

light. Straighter pillars never were raised to heaven, and finer murmurs of aspirations never were heard in any human church. What do they long for, these ever-whispering firs, that are always remembering the murmur of the distant sea?

This is the country in summer days, or in the quiet days of sunny autumn; but it has its wilder days of passion and tempest, when the gale sweeps down the clefts of the Apennines, and wakes to stormy music the wondrous harp of nature. Then the whole forest roars in answer to its call, and groans and quivers in its every fibre, and rouses and wrestles with this great invisible power, and shakes abroad its tumult of leaves, and lashes to and fro its branches; and the blast with its furious trumpeting comes up the cloven defiles, and strikes the bare vast slopes of the shorn hills, and, roaring for battle, sweeps thundering down the val-

ley, crowding before it a tumult of cloud and mist; and from above the heavens themselves respond with their dread artillery; and, fierce and swift, the lightning plunges its quivering blade into the earth, and strikes at random into the woods, and a great crash is heard as some tall leader of the forest falls.

Well sheltered, then, in our solid house, we listen to it as it roars without, and beats and howls at the windows, and lashes with gusts of rain the streaming panes, and threatens us vainly as we sit before our wide chimney, heaped with logs that the storm itself hath shaken for us to the ground; and watch the tongues of darting, passionate fire leap up the black throat of the chimney, to join the stormy rout; and every now and then stop in our talk to listen, half in awe. The Spirit of the Apennines is then worth communing with. It has many a wild thing to say that it is well for us to hear — better than gossip of the city; and where can one hear

it better than here in the heart of Vallombrosa ?—

"When the Apennine walks abroad with the storm."

Then comes the winter. I shall be gone then; but the poor peasants will stay, and hear what that has to say, when all the world about is covered with its snowy shroud of silence, and far off the valley smiles, like the happy valley of Rasselas; and they will crowd about their great black-throated chimneys, rough with soot, where blazes their fire of chips and broken brush, and branches gleaned from the wrecks of storm in the forest, and wish and wish, and want, and sigh, and suffer. To me it might have other things to say; to them it speaks of poverty, of suffering, of hunger, of no work, and, finally, of patience. This is the only flower, perhaps, which will grow for them in winter; and it is at once one of the most precious and one of the most common flowers that grows in Italy—*pazienza:* and, poor things, they have

need of it here in Vallombrosa. The wonder is to me to see their patience and their cheerfulness under the load they have to bear.

We boast of our civilisation—of the civilisation of Europe and of the nineteenth century. Alas for our civilisation, as we call it! What has it done, what does it do, to solve the great problem of humanity? Is all this poverty, all this suffering of human beings, helped by it, or is it caused by it?—that is the question. Is our so boasted civilisation the world balanced and tottering on its apex, or firmly settled on its true pyramidal base? Is Liberty anywhere much more than a name? Is it a living principle doing good, or a dead pretence? Was the universal brotherhood of man bound together by ties of love and animated by pure and unselfish motives — the grand community of Christ, where there should be no individual ownership of property, no selfish abstraction, and piling up of wealth only a vague and im-

possible dream? Were all His denunciations of riches empty phrases? Is there, of the millions who bow down before the altar and profess themselves Christians, any one who really believes His doctrines, who is willing to accept His conditions and renounce all personal wealth? If there be, I do not know him. Certainly the world is not organised on such principles. What would Christ say to the present state of things in Europe,—to the mighty armies and navies that eat out its heart; to the wars, and bloodshed, and battles for which all nations are arming and armed; to the enormous riches piled up in individual hoards; to the misery and suffering of the poor perishing for mere want at the doors of the rich. Is Christianity anything more than empty phrases and dogmas, and long prayers, and phylacteries, and formal services,—or in our generation do we pretend to know better than He what is best and what is practicable? If any one hints at

carrying out His system of universal brotherhood and community of goods, is he not looked upon pityingly? Do we not shake our heads wisely at him, and say, "Poor fellow, there is a bee in his bonnet! It would be better to put him into an insane asylum"?

Wandering through these woods, where nature preaches her sweet and beautiful gospel, in these autumnal afternoons, I plagued my mind with these thoughts; and before I have finished this little book you will see why I am thus tormented, and why I foolishly doubt that perhaps we have not, after all our boasting, and all our fine words, and all our huzzas for liberty and union, not only not solved the great problem of government, but perhaps got hold of it by the wrong end, and why it sometimes seems to one as if we had organised the devil's scheme instead of Christ's.

But we will put aside these considerations for the moment, and yield ourselves up to na-

ture, and bask in the sun, and drink of the cup of beauty, and enjoy the blessings that God has given as well as we can. There may be a fly in the cup, but no matter.

A beautiful walk of about eight miles carries us from our lonely house, through exquisite passages of scenery, through golden chestnut-groves and solemn fir-forests, to the ancient monastery of Vallombrosa. The road commands through its whole course the valley of the Sieve, and the rolling hills that swell and sink and rise again in ever-varying lines and masses, like the heaving of the billows in mid-ocean, and lift themselves far away against the horizon. Thousands of wild flowers smile along our path. The wild clematis climbs the shrubs, and drapes them with its silvery tufts. The spiring broom clusters everywhere. The wild rose, wearing now its coral hips, stretches and gropes about in the air. Daisies and

buttercups, purple scabias and pale pansies, delicate blue-bells, pale-purple malva, white broad-faced hemlock and silvery thistles, golden arnica, autumnal cyclamen, blue corn-flowers, St John's wort, and, in a word, all the common people of the wild flowers, enamel the rough sward. Here, too, long after the summer has passed, still hides in the grass the wild strawberry, for which Vallombrosa was famed of old.[1] At last we come to a small rill, which, tumbling over a rugged shelf of rock, goes its way through a cleft of dark pines down into the plain. This is the Salto del Diavolo, so called; for, as the legend goes, here the good saint Giovanni Gualberto was pursued by Satan, who caught him in his claws and cast him down the declivity. But it is difficult to kill a saint, and he fell unharmed into the valley.

We now descend through a deep dark defile

[1] "Et vaga prata ferunt æstu redolentia fraga," says Æmylus Acerbus, in his panegyric of San Giovanni Gualberto.

of pines, where the sunshine even at high noon scarcely penetrates, save here and there to freckle with spots of light the brown damp carpet,—a place that recalls that "deep romantic chasm" of Kubla Khan, "which slanted"

> "Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover,—
> A savage place, as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover."

And again climbing, we see before us the noble old monastery—placed as only the monks knew how to place a building, and commanding one of the most magnificent views that can be found even in this beautiful Italy. On one side the sloping hills are dark with miles of serried firs; on the other, they are golden-brown with glowing chestnuts; and above, forests of beeches lift their smooth trunks and climb the mountains. On a flat terrace, in the midst of all this, stands the monastery, a huge square building with inner courts, in the centre of which is the church, with

its square tower lifting itself above the mass in the sun. In front is an enclosed court, laid out as a garden, and within a wall; and passing out from this through the gateway, we come upon a large enclosed basin of purest water, fed by a perennial and gushing stream, in which the monks of old kept their preserves of trout in prosperous days.

Still beyond are walks through alleys of trees; and on the left, about five hundred paces from the gate, is a fountain which was once thought to possess miraculous powers of healing. "Fontis hujus aqua contra diversos dolores corporis est attributa: ibi blanda medicina confertur, sine tormento cura, sine horrore remedia et sanitas impunita," says Cassiodorus (Variarum, lib. ii. cap. 39). Such was the number of miracles performed by this fountain, that for centuries it was visited by pilgrims, and was held holy, somewhat as the waters of Lourdes are to-day, though by a far more limited number of believers.

Here at this fountain San Giovanni Gualberto, the founder of the monastery, journeying from Florence alone in search of some retired hermitage in which to hide himself, paused one summer's day in the year 1008. He was of one of the most noble and ancient families of Tuscany —his father, Gualberto Visdomini, claiming to come from the royal race of the Carlovingians (the first of his family having been created *cavaliere* by Charlemagne), and his mother being an Aldobrandini, of the direct line of Hugo, Duke of Tuscany. Indeed, according to the historian Pietro Monaldo, his ancestry went much further back, even to the times of Catiline, from whom he directly descended. After that famous conspiracy of ancient Rome was foiled by Cicero, and its chief was driven from the city, two *congiunti* of his came to Umbria, and there established themselves. The one who came to Florence took the name of Visdomini, and was the ancestor of San Giovanni.

The young Giovanni was brought up in the exercise of arms, and received the education of a gentleman. He was naturally of a fiery disposition. His early manhood had been given to wildness, worldliness, and dissipation at least, if not debauchery, and his conversion to a monastic life was sudden and remarkable. One of his friends, also a Visdomini, in a violent quarrel with his brother Hugo, lost all command of himself, and in a sudden fit of passion plunged his dagger into Hugo's breast and killed him on the spot. Giovanni, furious at his assassination, swore to avenge it. Visdomini fled, and for a time Giovanni pursued him in vain; but at last, on the morning of Good Friday, in the year 1003, as he was going escorted by his bodyguard to Florence, they met in a narrow pathway in the forest, escarped on either side with high rocks, where there was no escape. Drawing his sword, Giovanni told him to prepare for instant death; but his opponent, instead of de-

fending himself, dropped on his knees, and spreading out his arms and hands in the form of a cross, besought Giovanni to remember the day, to spare his life, and to grant him that mercy which otherwise he himself might vainly sue for in another life. Something there was in the mode of his prayer, and the expression, tone, and attitude of the man, which seemed to have touched to the quick the sensitive spirit of Giovanni, and operated an instant revolution of feeling and purpose. He forgave him on the spot, assisted him to rise, and dismissed him in safety with his blessing. He then at once repaired to the neighbouring monastery, at San Miniato, and there prostrated himself before a crucifix in prayer. As he gazed up, the figure of Christ bent his head to him, as if in approval of his act of clemency. The miracle so affected him that he at once went to the abbot, solemnly abjured his former life and courses, and begged to enter the confraternity as a brother monk. The

abbot at first refused to receive him, fearing the rage of his father, but finally consented, and Giovanni then took the religious vows in April 1004.

From this time forward he was no longer the same man, but distinguished himself by his humility, piety, and devotion to his new calling, and soon acquired so great a reputation and influence, that on the death of the abbot in 1008, he was unanimously chosen to take his place. This office, however, he could not be induced to accept, declaring himself, in his humility, to be unfitted for it in any way—by all his previous life, by his personal wishes, by his general incapacity to guide others—and stating that his own desire was rather to seek some peaceful and solitary hermitage, where he might spend his life in silent self-communion and prayer, as a hermit, afar from men and from the possibilities of ambition. Filled with these sentiments, he soon after left the convent, and wan-

dering forth on his solitary way from Florence, ascended the lonely hills of Vallombrosa. Here, weary and thirsting from his hot walk, he stopped beside the fountain which afterwards acquired such celebrity: the cool waters refreshed him; and enchanted by the magnificent prospect which opened before him, he here determined to stay, persuaded that this was to be the end of his wanderings, to which the hand of God had led him. The forest gave him shelter and food sufficient for his wants; the cool clear spring poured its perennial waters for his drink; and against the fear of serpents and wild animals, which then infested the woods, he found a defence in prayer.

In the neighbourhood were two hermits named Paolo and Guntelmo, who had here established themselves, and were living in two miserable huts. These joined him almost immediately; and little by little, though against his will at first—for he desired rather to live in solitude—

there gathered about him a small company of monks and hermits. They built a series of rude huts for shelter—in front of each of which was planted a cross, to conjure away demons and wild beasts—erected in the centre a place of prayer, and enclosed the whole with a circular wooden paling. Among the enemies which surrounded San Giovanni, or which he imagined to surround him, were wild beasts and demons; but his most serious and palpable foes were the bands of robbers who here found refuge, and who did their utmost to drive him thence by threats and assaults. The little community were beaten cruelly at times, their huts were torn down, and death threatened if they remained. But all was vain. They made no defence, suffered in silence, prayed for their enemies, returned good for evil, fed them in want, tended them when ill, and finally thus overcame them, and were left in peace.

The fame for sanctity of their leader—or pre-

positor, as he was called at first—spread throughout the land. The nobles of the surrounding country gave him aid and protection, granted him lands, and advanced him means to build a church. The Emperor Conrad II., with the Empress Gisela and all the Court, paid him a visit, and, touched by the piety and poverty of the little community, made them large presents. Gifts and grants of land poured in on all sides. Among the chief donors may be mentioned specially the Abbess Itta (head of the convent of St Hillario or St Ellero); the Counts Guidi, who were the direct descendants of Otho I., and the principal owners of the land thereabouts; afterwards the famous Countess Matilda, who conferred special honours and grants upon them; and the republic of Florence, which not only remitted all taxes upon the monastery, but also gave lands and favoured it in every way. The place was then called Acquabella and Acquabuona, from the supposed miraculous virtues of

the fountain, and it was not until long after that it received the name of Vallombrosa.

The life led by the monks was half claustral and half eremitical, and their penances and self-inflicted privations almost intolerable. At times they scarcely ate anything, reducing themselves to the point of starvation, and treating even a drink of pure water as a luxury not always permissible. One loaf of bread a-day was divided among three; and often this was made simply of *crusca*, the husks of the grain: and when this was wanting they lived on roots, and wild herbs, and nuts, and whatever they could pick up in the woods. But these penances, they at last found, were beyond human strength and resistance, and they came to the conclusion that God could not require of man more than man could bear. Still they practised extreme abstemiousness, strove in every way to drive out the demon of desire, that, despite their utmost efforts, would possess them, and endeavoured to be chaste, vir-

tuous, and unselfish. Above all, they practised hospitality from the very first, devoting themselves to good offices for the poor, and administering all their means to the succour of the miserable and suffering. One of their penances was to plunge their feet in ice-cold water, and there keep them till they were nearly frozen. And thus, with prayer, reading holy books, fasting, working on the ground, and tending the sick, they passed their lives. Finally, they adopted the complete ordinances of the Benedictines.

The benediction of God, they thought, was manifested to the prepositor, San Giovanni, by a fact they considered miraculous. The tree which grew beside his hut, anticipating the ordinary season, put forth its leaves long before all the others; shaded it during the summer with its abundant foliage; and was the last, when winter came, to shed its leaves on the ground. This was repeated year after year, and was con-

sidered a miracle, so that a wall was built about the tree, and it was consecrated and held in highest reverence. This tree was in the year 1008 full-grown; and in 1640, when Diego de Franchi wrote his 'Life of San Giovanni Gualberto,' it was still flourishing, and a print of it is engraved in his biography, surrounded by a wall, and with an inscription. What is supposed to be the same tree, surrounded by a wall corresponding in appearance to the old print, is still living and flourishing after these many centuries.

The monastery grew in numbers and in fame; and the Countess Matilda, in addition to her donations, conferred upon the prepositor or prior —or abbot, as he finally was called—the title of Count of Magnale,—the same title to pass to his successors. These donations were confirmed at a later period by the Emperor Otho IV., who took the convent under his special protection, and gave the title of Marchese di Monteverde to the

prior. The original hermitage (Eremo), as it was called, was built in 1015; but as time went on, it was repeatedly enlarged and rebuilt. In the fifteenth century the cloisters were increased and a new church erected; and finally, in 1640, the façade, as it now appears, was added under the pastorate of Don Averardo Niccolini of Florence, and the church and monastery enriched by pictures, statues, codices, engravings, and a large and valuable library.

It is not a matter of any great importance, as far as this little book is concerned, to establish the exact dates of the various events in the life of San Giovanni Gualberto, nor, indeed, would it be easy to do so, as there is a discrepancy in regard to them among the accredited chroniclers of Vallombrosa and biographers of the saint, amounting to nearly thirty years. But in order to avoid the imputation of carelessness on this point, it may be as well briefly to indicate the authorities for the dates I have given.

The historians of the Benedictine Order generally fix the date of the arrival of the saint at Vallombrosa at 1008, and of the foundation of the hermitage there at 1015: Ascanio Tamburino states it even earlier, in 1012. Padre Helyot, however, is of opinion that the establishment of this hermitage could not be earlier than 1039, and in defending this view he argues the question at considerable length. The date of the saint's death in 1073 seems to be well established, but the date of his birth, and of the period when he went first to Vallombrosa, is extremely doubtful,—and on this point the authorities do not agree. Andrea da Genova, Taddeo Ademaro, and Diego Franchi agree as to the date of his death, and say that he was then eighty years of age. This would fix the date of his birth at 993; but if this be so, he would have been only sixteen years of age in 1008, when they say that he went to Vallombrosa. This, according to their own dates, must

be a mistake, since they affirm that he assumed the monastic dress at eighteen years of age, stayed four years at the convent of San Miniato before going to Vallombrosa, and there remained seven years before building the first hermitage. Giving him one year at Camaldoli, this would have brought him to Vallombrosa in 1016, and fixed the foundation of the hermitage at 1023. Padre Abbate Davanzati (a Vallombrosan) clears up these dates very simply by stating that he was eighty-eight years of age, and not eighty, when he died. This would give his birth at 985, and adding eighteen years—the age at which he took his vows—four years spent at San Miniato, and one year at Camaldoli, would fix his arrival at Vallombrosa at 1008, as they state. Moroni also gives the date of his birth at 985; Padre Soldani, the Vallombrosan, also fixes the date of the first hermitage at 1015, seven years after his arrival, and in this he is supported by various authorities.

Undoubtedly, when the hermitage was first established, there might have been something to fear from the beasts of prey, wolves, and serpents with which the forest then abounded, according to tradition; but besides these, the saint himself declares in a letter—and in this he is upheld by various writers of the period —that terrible voices were heard at night all around them, which they held to be voices of demons, and phantasms of the Evil One; and even a fierce dragon and basilisk threatened their lives. But all these were quelled by prayer, as they were probably evoked by the excitement of the brain and nerves occasioned by too prolonged abstinence from food. The penances and privations of the saint himself were carried to such a point that he was subject to constant fainting-fits, to syncope, and even tetanus, so that his teeth were locked together, and he could only be relieved by prising them apart with a knife, and administering some

stimulants. In such a state it is easy to account for all these visions, which were then held to be devilish temptations. More efficacious than his prayers, seems to have been the more generous diet which at last he was forced to take, — condescending under great pressure to add to his nourishment a few ounces more of food, and at times to partake of something cooked, and even to take a fomentation of wine —inasmuch as the Apostle permitted a little wine for the stomach's sake.

The great precepts of the monastery which San Giovanni preached and ordained, were charity and hospitality. In process of time the monastery grew rich with the many donations of the pious, and was enlarged, and increased in influence and in numbers. A hospital was then established for the sick, and for the poor, where medical aid was given and food supplied to those who were in need and suffering. All charities and donations they accepted

in trust for those who were ill and poor; and, as it would seem, these were administered in a thoroughly Christian spirit, so that the poor and sick of all the country about blessed these monks. Besides this, in the way of hospitality they gave free lodging and food to all honest travellers or visitors for three days. The fifth part of all their revenues they devoted to the hospital. The laws of their order not permitting women to enter the monastery, they built a house expressly for them, for sick, poor, and visitors, where all the obligations of charity and hospitality were performed. So the monastery became celebrated everywhere, and every one sang its praises. "Vallombrosa," says Ariosto—

> "Vallombrosa, così fù nominata una Badia
> Ricca e bella nè men religiosa,
> E cortese a chiunque vi venia." *

For their motto they had, says De Franchi, "Obedience to one's elders, community of life

* Cant. 22, st. 36.

and property, concord between the brothers, and love to one's neighbours."

Besides keeping up the monastery at Vallombrosa, the Abbot San Giovanni applied the revenues of this property, which had now become very large, to the erection and establishment of a number of other monasteries under similar regulations, and of restoring still others which had fallen into decay. The utmost efforts of the abbot were specially directed against simony, and to insure decorum and honesty of life and doctrine. Despite his ill-health, he travelled much in search of good works to do, and to succour the poor. "Præcipuus paupertatis amicus" was the title given him by the writers of his time. "Well though he knew that riches are thorns" (*spine*), says De Franchi, "and that it is far better to be without them than not fitly to employ them, he ever feared, although his brethren monks held them in common, that their hearts would be impelled by them to

courses averse from peace and purity. Therefore he resolved to deprive them of a portion of their riches, reserving only what sufficed for a tranquil and a happy life, and thus blessing, with the gifts that they had received from the laity, the laity and the people. In order to supply the wants of the needy, he laboured himself with his old and infirm body to cultivate the land and the gardens around, thus setting an example to all other monks, and would not allow his own monastery to have riches which were not used in common and with humility of spirit." *O si sic omnes!* Well may we cry with De Franchi, "O vicissitudine delle antiche virtù! O vestigie smarrite!"

Plague and famine, and earthquake and tempest, at this time came upon Italy, and San Giovanni made a tour of visits to the various monasteries subject to his authority, to see that the hospitals were well furnished, and open to all who needed aid, reproving severely those in

which he found a surplus of provisions set aside, and praising those wherein the monks had exposed themselves to suffering in order to expend their utmost means in charity. "Cur, inquit, adeo abundamus, cum multos egere videamus?" To these noble sentiments and acts the world responded, and the more that was given away, the more was brought to his door. One day the monks found themselves without anything to eat except three loaves of bread. By order of the abbot a sheep was killed, and the meat was placed on the table. But all refused to eat of it, and satisfied themselves with the crumbs of bread that remained. The next morning, a number of sacks of corn and grain, and other comestibles, were brought to their gate, and the drivers would say nothing but that it was a gift, sent by gentlemen whom they would not name. The gates of the monastery were then surrounded by the poor, and everything was given away. On another occasion, when the fail-

ure of the harvest had brought much suffering to the poor, he ordered the granaries of the monastery of St Salvi to be opened, and every one who was in need to be supplied to the last grain. In another season of famine he sold all the sacred vases and utensils of the church, and all the priestly ornaments and dresses, to give their proceeds to the hungry. I give these particulars to show the spirit which animated this noble abbot; and between then and now the reader himself may make the comparison, and see how far we have improved on his administration.

Many are the miracles attributed to San Giovanni, but these we will leave aside. The great miracle was the goodness of the man, and the noble work he did. In the year 1073 he died, at the good old age of eighty-eight years.

The same spirit which had animated San Giovanni continued to govern the Order, and

his memory and precepts were held in highest honour and reverence. The monastery flourished, and grew in wealth and territory until it possessed a vast country, rich in pasture and forest, keeping up its reputation for charity and hospitality, and affording asylum and sustenance to all the poor who came to its gates. The land was well cultivated; the willing labourer always found work there; and many were the pilgrims who visited it from all parts of Europe, to all of whom it accorded a generous hospitality. Here, among others, came Milton, in the flower of his youth, to gaze on this magnificent panorama, to store his mind with images and pictures—that long remained vivid when the outer windows of his sight were closed—to study in the library, to pace the terraces, to ponder the grand poem of his later years, and to leave behind him a memory dear to all who love English poetry. The landscape is still the same as when he saw it, and the leaves strew the hillsides as thickly

as when he wandered among these shady groves. His shadow walks with every English traveller through the long corridors, where once the monks who are now but dust listened to his silvery tones, and wondered perhaps at this fair youth, with long and golden hair, who came from a far-away country, and spoke softly if brokenly in their native tongue. The charm of this place long lingered in his mind, and he apparently drew upon it for his description of Paradise in his great poem. Already, while pacing these cloisters and woods, he was meditating an epic work, the theme of which was the history of King Arthur and his knights; and in a Latin poem addressed at this time to his friend Manso, Marquis of Villa, he thus alludes to it:—

"Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictæ sociali fœdere mensæ
Magnanimos Heroas, et (O modo spiritus adsit)
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges!"

This, however, gradually faded from his mind, and gave place to the loftier and grander theme to which he afterwards dedicated his great powers. The impression made by Vallombrosa never left him; and perhaps it was the memory of this lovely landscape, with Florence in the distance, which rose before his blind eyes when he wrote these lines:—

"As when a scout
Through dark and desert ways with pain hath trod
All night, at last, by break of cheerful dawn,
Obtains the brow of some high-climbing hill,
Which to his eye discovers unaware
The goodly prospect of some foreign land
First seen, or some renowned metropolis
With glistering spires and pinnacles adorned,
Which now the rising sun gilds with his beams." *

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* 'Paradise Lost,' Book iii. 543; see also Book iv. 135. So, too, he recalls this spot in his "Epitaphium Damonis," where he says—

"At jam solus agros, jam pascua solus oberro,
Sicubi ramosæ densantur vallibus umbræ;"

or where he speaks of "Flumina, fontesque vagos, nemorumque recessus," in the same poem, his friend Carlo Deodati being the Damon of the poem.

Among the other memories attached to Vallombrosa is that of the monk Guido—commonly called Guido d'Arezzo or Aretino—to whom we owe the modern method of notation in music, the ordination of the gamut, the arrangement of notes in lines and spaces, and the names *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la,* which he first gave to the notes, and which they still retain. Whether he actually resided here is open to doubt. Very little is known accurately in regard to his life. The dates of his birth and his death are only proximately established; but he is believed to have been born towards the end of the tenth century—in or about 995. It also seems to be established that he was a monk of Pomposa, and abbot of some convent,—whether at Camaldoli, Vallombrosa, Sta Croce d'Avellana, or elsewhere in Italy, Germany, Normandy, is questioned: all claim him. If he resided at Vallombrosa, it must have been in the very early days of that monastery, since the original Eremo was only

built in 1015, and towards the latter part of his life. But whether or not he was here in fact, here he is in tradition at least, and his memory is associated with this place; and here we may fancy him walking through the forests, meditating his musical scheme, and chanting the hymn of San Giovanni, from the first syllables of which he took the names which he gave to the musical notes:—

Ut queant laxis,
Re-sonare fibris,
Mi-ra gestorum,
Fa-muli tuorum,
Sol-ve polluti,
La-bii reatum,
Sancte Joannes.

Here also—under the shadows of these trees, and along these hills—might once be seen the august figures of the famous Countess Matilda, the Empress Gisela, the Abbess Itta, the Countess Ermellina; of the Emperors Conrad II., Henry III., and the third and fourth Othos,

and long afterwards, Lorenzo the Magnificent; of the Popes Victor II., Alexander II. and IV., Innocent II., Pascal II. (all of whom were monks of Vallombrosa), Leo IX., who made a journey to Vallombrosa expressly to see San Giovanni, and many another Papal figure.

But the most interesting and prominent of all the Papal figures associated with Vallombrosa is that of the famous and haughty Hildebrand, afterwards Gregory VII., who carried the Papacy to its utmost height of domination, triumphed over imperialism, forced Henry to his knees at Canossa, and finally was driven from Rome to end his days at Salerno with the proud and bitter saying, "I have loved justice and hated iniquity, and therefore I die in exile." Here we may see him in imagination traversing the forests alone, and pondering earnestly the future; or accompanied by his devoted patron and friend the Countess Matilda, pausing under the shadows to discuss with her the claims of the Church, and

lay out plans for its aggrandisement and purification. Here, according to some historian, it was that he first assumed the monastic robes and took his early vows, before he went to Cluny; and with these murmurous woods his name and his figure are closely associated, at least by tradition.

Various are the accounts as to where he first took orders and made his vows as a monk. The first is that of Ottone Frisonga (1150), Baronius (1048), and Bernried (1120), who assert that it was at Cluny. The second is that of the Bollandists, who say that it was at the monastery of Sta Maria del Monte Aventino at Rome; the third, that it was in Domo S. Petri; the fourth, that it was at the monastery of San Benedetto de Calvello, near Soana; and the last, that it was at the monastery at Vallombrosa. This is directly affirmed, among other writers, by Padre Soldani, himself a learned Vallombrosan monk, in his 'Questioni Vallombrosene' and his 'Istoria di Passegrano,' and particularly

defended and sustained in an elaborate series of letters on the subject, in which the whole question is discussed ('Sopra il Monacato e la Parentela di S. Gregory VII.) His view is supported by the Sacra Congregazione de' Riti, which decreed on the 21st of January 1673 that Gregory should be placed in the "Martirologio Romano" for the day of the 25th of May, under the title of Vallombrosan Monk. Soldani also asserts that he was related to San Giovanni Gualberto, which lends probability to his view. Whatever be the real facts, as we wander through the woods of Vallombrosa we may, without fear of critics, give loose to our fancy, and dream at least that we see that noble figure of Gregory walking through its meditative paths.

Besides these memories also we may recall San Pietro Igneo, who here underwent the ordeal of fire, and passed unharmed through the flames; and Beato Tesoro Beccaria, the martyr; and San Torello, and San Benedetto Uberto of the royal

blood of the Longobards, and many another priest and monk of note. Here, too, lived the distinguished botanist Buono Faggi, and Father Hugford, the English Benedictine, who, in the last century, revived and improved the art of imitating marble in scagliola, and specimens of whose skill still hang on the walls of the monastery; and (as tradition says) Mattio Bandello, the author of the famous *novelle*, that rival those of Boccaccio—at least in their looseness, if not in their style; and here, too, wandered often Christofano Landino, who wrote the celebrated comments on Dante, and whose mummied body may still be seen in the church at Borgo-alla-Collina, about fourteen miles distant, with this inscription :—

"Di Dante, di Maron, del Venosino
Quei che seppe spilgar gri alti pensieri
Miralo, passegier, quest' è il Landino—
D'Ovidio imitò i versi lusinghieri—
Spiro nel gran Lorenzo estro divino—
Dopo tre scorsi omai secori interi
Incorotto lo vedi ; anche il suo frale
Par che natura reso abbia immortale."

And here Francesco Berni, coming from his native town of Lamporecchio, meditated those humoristic and sarcastic poems that gave his name in Italy to all similar compositions.

For eight centuries this monastery flourished, and to a certain extent at least preserved its high reputation for charity and hospitality. But in the beginning of the present century a sad change came over its fortunes. The first bolt of doom fell upon it when Napoleon in 1810 swept away with a rude conquering hand the right of ecclesiastical property, confiscated most of the conventual houses, seized their possessions, and drove the monks forth to seek what refuge they could in the world. Vallombrosa was not excepted from his ban. The monastery and church were despoiled of their treasures. Its large domains were seized, and the monks themselves were forced to abandon the asylum which had been the home of their order for centuries.

After the fall of Napoleon, when Austria resumed its sovereignty in Tuscany, the monks were reinstated as far as possible by Leopold in their rights and possessions, and again returned to the monastery. A considerable portion of their lands had, however, in the meantime, been sold, and passed into the hands of other proprietors, and this could not be reclaimed. Still a large part of it remained, and this again became theirs. Their return was welcomed by all the neighbourhood, and especially by the peasants and the poor, who all had felt the benefit of their charity, and many of whom had earned their living by labour on the land. They administered the property well, and the large profit it yielded seems to have been devoted to good ends. The poor and disabled found always at the convent doors their soup and bread. The able-bodied were hired to work in the fields, to tend the cattle and herds, to cut the trees, to gather the dead wood or the fruits of the forest,

and thus they earned a fair living. If ill, they were taken care of, and found beds in the hospital, and fitting medicines, free of expense.

The number of monks was in later times about 150, varying a little from year to year. Their lives were not as empty as the lives of most monks are; for besides their religious exercises and their studies, from which latter no particularly valuable literary results seem to have been derived, they had other outdoor duties and amusements to occupy their time and their minds.

Mounted on their donkeys or the small nervous horses of the Maremma, they made their rounds of the woods and fields to superintend the farms, the forests, the herds; or with their guns on their shoulders, and accompanied by their dogs, they pursued the game with which the place abounded.

The austerity of the early days declined as time went on, though the strict rules of the

order were kept. One particular penance, however, they always continued to practise. This was to rise at one o'clock every morning, and go from their cells to the church, there to recite their prayers. The monks were genial and kindly to the peasants, and to all with whom they had intercourse, and they were universally liked. The scandal is—and it may be nothing but scandal—that they did not all observe very strenuously the strict laws of that chastity which in earlier days was enforced; and it was the belief that they were the fathers of many of the children in the neighbourhood, particularly in the little village of Tosi. Whether this be true or not, it did not at all embitter their relations with the fathers, husbands, or brothers: all was certainly taken in good part, and if anything was to be forgiven, it was forgiven and smiled at. Certain it is, that whatever of this kind may have occurred, it was quite exceptional to the character and habits of the main body of

the brothers, who led a simple dignified life, and were anything but idle and useless members of society.

Besides all the rest of their duties, they occupied themselves in public instruction, and founded at the monastery a seminary or college for the education of young men of rank. The Rev. John Chetwood Eustace, in his 'Classical Tour through Italy,' who visited the convent in the early part of this century, about the year 1810, characterises this seminary as "excellent." "Many of the Florentine youth of rank," he says, "were there at the time of our visit. Their dress is a black gown with a black collar lined and edged with white. We were present at one of their amusements, which was the Calcio or Balloon, a game of great repute both in Italy and France. Their looks and manners seemed to display the advantages, both physical and moral, of the situation."

The old belief of San Giovanni and his

brother hermits as to the wild beasts, basilisks, and demons that haunt the place, does not, apparently, seem to have entirely died out even at the period when Mr Eustace paid his visit to the monastery. One of the "good fathers," in conversation with him, told him that "during the winter, which commences here in October and lasts till May, they were buried in snow or enveloped in clouds, and besieged by bears and wolves prowling round the walls and in the forests. '*Orsi, lupi, e tutte le peste,*' was his emphatic expression." I am afraid the good father drew largely on his imagination, or on the credulity of his listener, in these statements. I have just been in Vallombrosa in late October, and never was there a scene more enchanting and genial. The leaves were thick on the trees, and the country smiling with flowers. As for the *orsi, lupi, e tutte le peste,* I saw none, I heard of none,—unless the good father considered women as coming under the last classi-

fication, and the Government guards under the first, and mistook the foxes for wolves.

Before the monastery was despoiled it possessed a remarkably interesting library, containing a considerable number of rare and valuable ancient manuscripts, and rich in ecclesiastical works. These, however, were piled pell-mell together and carried away exposed in carts, some here, some there. Many, of course, were lost; but what remains of them are now deposited among the national archives in Florence. Their paintings, some of which were of rare excellence; their treasures of plate; their elaborately embroidered vestments and altar-cloths; their sculptured figures in silver or terra-cotta, among which were some admirable bassi rilievi by Luca della Robbia,—were all taken, and the greater part of them carried to Paris or sold.[1]

[1] "The pictures, designs, and engravings" (says Fontani in his 'Viaggio Istorico Pittorico dell' Italia,' p. 160, 1818), "were numberless, and even to cite them, and enumerate in-

Their museum of mineralogy, which, for the period and place, was considerable, was not only scattered, but the specimens they had collected were thrown away by the roadside or in the woods as of no value, and even to the present day they are occasionally unearthed. Their pharmacy, which was celebrated, was also broken up; and a very considerable number of the beautiful old majolica vases with which it was furnished were found only last year in an antiquary's shop, and sold for almost nothing. In a word, the monastery was not only despoiled, but despoiled in the most reckless way: of all its treasures, nothing, or almost nothing, now remains.

On the return of the monks from their exile,

dividually one by one their merits, would be an extremely long and tiresome task. The library was rich in works adapted to sacred study, and in the learned languages, as well as in subjects relating to art and to modern philosophy. It contained also rare editions, especially of the fifteenth century, and valuable manuscripts, rich with beautiful ornamentation and miniatures."

the Grand Duke Leopold did what he could to reinstate them in their possessions; but much was irrevocably lost. Of the land, as I have said, a considerable portion has been sold; and dotted here and there over this property are little fragments and corners of land owned by private persons, generally peasants. Their landed property, however, was still very extensive and productive. Taxes then in Tuscany were very light; for the Government was inexpensively conducted, the country was prosperous, the revenues large, the Grand Duke paternal in his rule, the court simple, industry flourishing, and the cost of living slight in comparison with what it now is. Whatever political griefs the Tuscans may have had to complain of, they were not oppressed by taxes and Government impositions as they now are. As the annual taxes on this property were 29,000 *scudi*, it is plain that the revenues it yielded must have been very large. Reckoned at 6 per cent, they would

have amounted to 400,000 *scudi*, which is more than 2,000,000 francs.

How, then, was this revenue obtained? In the first place, from the forests, which yielded an immense supply of timber, that in itself was very valuable for building—being principally of chestnut, beech, and firs. What was not fitted for this purpose served as firewood. Again, the fruit of the chestnuts, enormous in quantity, brought in a very considerable sum. A great saw-mill, run by water-power, was in constant operation; and this alone, it was calculated, paid the Government tax. Besides this, herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were pastured here, and bred. One great farm, called the Mettata, was devoted to dairy purposes, and housed a hundred cows; another, the Porcaria, was a farm for pigs. Still others were sown with grain; and though a good deal of the land was wild and unproductive, yet a large portion was fairly well cultivated. To carry on all this a

great number of persons was required; and all the labouring population found their benefit from it, as well as the towns and cities, which were thus supplied with food, and fruit, and timber.

This state of things continued until Tuscany renounced, by popular vote, its autonomy, and annexed itself to Piedmont and the young kingdom of Italy. Then came the abolition of the monastic houses, and the expropriation of all their property; and Vallombrosa, among the rest, became the public domain. The monks were driven away, and the property is now administered by the Italian Government.

For one, on principle, I protest against this violent assumption by the Government—this expropriation, without fair remuneration, of monastic property. It is a clear violation of all rights of property, or all so-called rights admitted and established by the consent of all

civilised nations, for *ab origine* the only right is force,—

> "That they shall take who have the power,
> And they shall keep who can."

If a Government can sequester and assume at its will, without payment therefor, all property belonging to religious bodies and communities, why can it not, on the same principle, take the property belonging to any other class or corporation — to merchants, to artists, to princes, to hospitals, to colleges? Of course, it is admitted by established laws that it may, for the public necessity or benefit, take any private property, but solely on one condition, that it gives a fair remuneration for it; and this is precisely what it does not do in the case of monastic bodies. If monastic institutions are contrary to what are deemed the best interests of the State, it may abolish them; it may prohibit the establishment of such bodies for the future; it may possibly even break up those that

exist: granted, but only on the same conditions which would apply to all other property held by all other bodies. There cannot justly be one law for monks and nuns as to property, and a totally different one for all other persons. This would be simply a tyrannical exercise of power, contrary to all equity, contrary to all recognised principles of law. In the case of religious corporations, their lands and houses have been given, granted, or purchased by them according to law; and it is impossible to see why they should be made an exception to all other persons, why their lands should be virtually wrested from them without adequate remuneration, and why they should be turned out into the world on a scanty pittance, scarcely sufficient to enable them to live. It is even worse in some respects for them than for any other class; for their vows, and habits of life, and religious pledges, not only render them unfit for other avocations, but disable them from assuming them. I have no special admira-

tion for or sympathy with monastic bodies. They have undoubtedly done good work in the past, and in their monasteries for centuries was kept alive the fire of literature, which was elsewhere almost entirely extinguished. Without them a gross darkness would have covered the world; the precious works of ancient learning would have been lost; science would have suffered total eclipse, and civilisation declined. If there was a good deal of superstition mixed up with their religious doctrines, if their lives were not on the highest line of Christianity, their influence was at least humanising. They afforded refuge and succour to the poor; they exercised the duties of hospitality; they preached and practised charity to their neighbours, and held up a higher standard of life. They showed at times rare examples of piety and good works; and at all events, whatever were their shortcomings, they were above the general level of society. Their lands and houses were solemnly

and formally given to them by deed or bequest. They were as absolute owners of them by law as any other persons or bodies were of their houses and lands: and if it is now thought, on the whole, that their good work has been accomplished, and their influence is noxious, this may be a good reason, even if it be a mistaken one, for abolishing them as corporations, and restricting their powers and rights for the future; but it is not a good reason for depriving them of their possessions without proper remuneration, and making them exceptions to the laws applying to all other persons and property. Liberty and law in a properly administered country are universal in their operation. It is not one thing for one class and another for another class.

But Italy has thought differently, and has abolished most of the monastic orders, and confiscated the greater portion of their property, without that fair remuneration which would

have been denied to no other class; and in its estimation, as Hosea Biglow says—

> "Libbaty's a kind of thing
> That don't agree with niggers"

—or monks. Among other monasteries, Vallombrosa has been confiscated; and of the hundred monks who have lived and administered this large property, and studied and performed the duties of hospitality and charity, only three now remain—on sufferance—deprived of all rights of ownership.

The question is, on the whole (without regard to the justice and equity of the change), What advantage has been gained by the nation—the people at large—or the people and peasants of the neighbourhood? In the matter of revenue, the nation has certainly been the loser. As we have already seen, under the administration of the monks the taxes then paid to the Government, light as taxes were then, amounted to 29,000 *scudi* or *francesconi*—equivalent to about

125,000 francs in gold—all of which was derived from the profits of one great saw-mill. At present the net income of the entire property is about 45,000 *lire* or francs in paper, at a discount of from 10 to 12 per cent, or about 60,000 in gross. The annual loss, then, is at least from 65,000, taking the gross revenue, to 80,000, taking the net revenue, as we properly should.

What advantage has been derived by the people, and the peasants and labouring classes of the neighbourhood, the latter of whom depended on it for their living? Absolutely none, and worse than none. The saw-mill exists no longer: it has been done away with. There is absolutely no tillage or cultivation of the land, which lies dead and unproductive, save in its growth of forest-trees. The solid stone farmhouses are all untenanted, and falling to ruin daily, save one or two which are inhabited by the guards of the forest. One of these (called the Mettata) is the

remnant of what was formerly the centre of a large dairy-farm, and gave stabling to some hundred cows. But no cows pasture there now on the grassy slopes from which not even the hay is mown; and the greater part of the house was torn down by order of the Government a couple of years ago—for what reason it is difficult to imagine, as it was strongly built of solid stone, and would have stood there even if left alone for a century. The farm of the Porcaria (or Porcheria, as it is now more fitly called), where herds of pigs were kept, and yielded a large profit, is abolished, and the building is untenanted. Here and there are to be seen small plantations or nurseries of young trees; and this is all that is now cultivated on these miles of magnificent country. No cattle are seen or allowed; no flocks of sheep; no fields of grain; no cultivation of any kind, save a few small plantations of infant trees. All the revenue is

given by nature, almost without the assistance of man. One house alone, called the Lago, has been reclaimed; and this was the old hunting-box of the Medici, which my friends have taken on lease, and repaired and put into habitable condition; but even this the Government despoiled of its old castellated towers, which lent a picturesque and medieval character to the building. The Casetta, another old stone house, with large farms connected with it, is also utterly deserted and left to its fate. All that remains of its former cultivation is a small patch of plantation in front. Standing there, what a magnificent prospect opens before the eye!—over the turbulent rolling waves of mountains, which lie below for many a mile basking in the sunshine, with little valleys scattered here and there, dotting the distant slopes, and Pontassieve clinging to the river-banks; and Florence, far beyond, with its towers and domes; and armies of firs

and chestnuts and beeches crowding up the hill-sides; and the blue smoke of charcoal-burners winding up into the tender sky; and the rugged fields alive with wild flowers—ferns, gorse, and broom.

All these farms, and fields, and herds, and forests once furnished work for the labourer and the farmer and the peasant; and their life was thus rendered comparatively easy and happy. Now there is nothing for them to do or to gain, and they are very poor and miserable. All the natural products of the woods and fields are farmed out, after the usual custom of the Government, at an annual rate. These are the chestnuts which heap the ground in the autumn, and the brushwood and *débris* of the forest; and only what is left of gleaning, after the harvest, is allowed to the poor, who even pay for this a very small price. On these gleanings, for the most part, they live. And every day in the autumn you will meet them gathering the few

chestnuts which remain on the ground, and tying together fascines of small brushwood, and broken sticks, with which to warm themselves and cook their poor fare in winter. Once in a while they get a little work and a few *sous* to eke out their small store. During the summer they get along fairly well. The climate is kindly, and the woods supply them with berries, especially with raspberries and wild strawberries, which here grow in great abundance, and which they gather and sell. In the autumn there are thousands of mushrooms of every kind, which they gather and carry to the villages and towns, and there sell for almost nothing to dealers, to be sent to the city. These mushrooms are delicious, and some of them so large and succulent that one of them makes a dish by itself. Besides the common kind known to us, there are the large orange-hued *ovole*, the delicate foliated *alberetti*, the lilac-grey *porcini*, and many another, which we class among the foul funguses, avoid

as poisonous, and call by the opprobrious name of toad-stools.[1]

These poor people rarely taste of meat,—it is too expensive. Their chief food is a sort of heavy bread made of dry and ground chestnuts, or a kind of coarse grain, with beans, roots, or fruits which they find in the woods, the nuts of the beech, and potatoes when they can afford to buy them. Nor have they much even of this fare. How they manage to live on it is to me a mystery; and a still greater mystery it seemed

[1] All the slopes of the Apennines abound in mushrooms, some of which are of very large size. Soldani, in his 'Guida storica,' says that in the neighbourhood of Camaldoli there is a certain kind of fungus called Vesce di Lupo, globular in shape, and white within and without, which attains the weight of 24 Italian pounds; and he adds, in confirmation of his statement, the fact that a certain Padre Don Adelelmo, a Camaldolese monk, made him and his uncle a present of one of these Vesci, which, when whole, weighed 21 lb., and that he and his family ate it and found it excellent. This mushroom is probably the same as that described by Theophrastus (Hist. Plant., lib. i. cap. 9) as the Cranium, on account of its resemblance to the human skull. Marsili also describes a mushroom which grows near Padua, along the Euganean Hills, which sometimes weighs 25 lb.

when they showed me the small store of their gleanings of chestnuts which they had laid up for their winter supply. Still, with all their privations, they look strong and healthy. The children were rosy and vigorous, the maidens some of them handsome, and all well-grown and erect. So also the young men were fine-looking, stalwart fellows. But age soon tells upon them; they grow old early; and when disease strikes them, they have little powers of resistance. On all their faces, after they had passed thirty, there was the pinched, sad look of patient poverty, and a certain refinement, too, of expression in their worn faces, as well as great gentleness of manner and speech—at least among those whom I saw and to whom I spoke—that awakened sympathy and respect. None of them begged, though it was plain that they were in need.

I was speaking of them one evening as we were sitting round our dinner-table, when the

Marquis Fornace said of some of the peasant girls,—"All are remarkably handsome, or rather, I should say, were, for I only knew the place years ago. Beppa, for instance. Beppa was a great beauty. Do you remember Beppa?" turning to our host.

"Beppa? of course I do. She was born in this very house where we are now living; and as I used frequently to shoot over this ground years ago, when I was a bachelor, many a night I have passed here when she was growing up into a woman. Yes, she was handsome."

"Handsome? she was magnificent! What eyes! dark and luminous, and clear as an autumn night. Then what teeth! the pearls of Marchesini were nothing beside them. What a smile! What a figure, lithe as a willow, and full of grace! Ah, what a beauty!"

"Poet!" cried our host — "poet! He exaggerates, as all poets do. Still, there is some foundation in fact for what he says. Beppa

had fine eyes and superb teeth, I admit, and was a very pretty girl. Of course, she was slender, but she was young; and all the women here are slender. Elvira, her sister-in-law, was really a beauty, and had one of those Madonna faces such as Raffaelle delighted to paint, such as any painter might rejoice to have as a model —simple, sweet, refined, and peaceful."

"Ah! I never saw her," said the Marquis; "but I daresay she was all you describe her to be. But Beppa, Beppa was my beauty."

"What there was besides her eyes and teeth that was charming in Beppa was a fine carelessness and thoughtlessness of bearing, a certain frank light-hearted way she had in all her movements and speech—a sort of freedom, like a wild natural thing that the world had not tamed."

"Do you remember," said the Marquis, "that little expedition we made together years ago (how the years go! it must be at least twelve

—more, perhaps; and it seems scarcely six months!)—in May, I think, or it might have been later in the year? Janet was with us, and the M.'s, and we set out from Vallombrosa to walk to Poder Nuovo and picnic in the woods; and as we were coming up the rough road, a little way from the Lago, suddenly 'Poum, poum' above us roared the thunder like a broadside of a hundred guns, and the heavens seemed to split open, and down came the rain in a deluge. When it rains in this country, it rains—it does not make believe. Fortunately we all of us, save you, had umbrellas and waterproofs, and so we were protected; but you, after the foolish way you always had, scorned such *impedimenta*—and there you were, with nothing to shield you, saying you did not care for such trifles. Well, in a few minutes you were drenched to the skin, and dripping as a drowned rat, and we were all of us glad to find a refuge here at the Lago. There and then it was that

I first saw Beppa, standing in the doorway, and inviting us to come in for shelter. Glad enough we were to accept her smiling invitation, and in we went. She piled up in the vast fireplace a heap of dry fascines and broken boughs, and in a few minutes broad quivering sheets of flame flashed and roared up the chimney, and we all gathered about it to dry ourselves. But you were too thoroughly drenched to be dried in this way, and cried out to Beppa, who was bustling about, and laughing with us, and finding us chairs and benches, and helping the ladies—'Beppa, I say, I must take off these clothes to be dried. Is there nothing you can give me to put on while they are drying—no old coat or cloak of the *babbo's?*—no matter what.'

"'Nothing, signor, nothing—unless you will put on one of my dresses,' laughed Beppa. 'If that will do, it is quite at your service; but I am afraid that will not do.'

"'And why not?' you cried. 'It will do

capitally, if you will lend it to me. *Presto! presto!* let me have it!'

"'*Davvero*,' said Beppa, 'really you are joking.'

"'Not a bit of it,' you cried; 'not a bit of it! Let me have it. *Via!*'

"Beppa entered into the joke at once, and off you and she went; and then she returned, shrugging her shoulders and laughing. After a short time, in you came. *Madonna mia*, what a figure you were, dressed in one of her gowns! I never shall forget it. We welcomed you with shouts, and laughed till we could laugh no longer for very pain; and Beppa clapped her hands, and bent herself down to the ground with laughing, and spread herself against the wall, utterly overcome with the joke. What a mad company we were! *Per Bacco!* these were glorious days! Then we put some chestnuts in the ashes to roast, and talked and chattered while the storm passed by. What a picture it

was—worthy the brush of Rembrandt in its effects! The fire darting its quivering tongues up the chimney, redly illuminating our faces and figures, and gleaming on the black rafters overhead; the shadows on the old walls, wavering about as we moved; the faint light of the day, peering through the small iron-barred windows; and then the peals of thunder, echoing along the hills as the storm wore away! It was a scene not to forget. That was my first acquaintance with Beppa. Where is she now? What has become of her?"

"Ah!" said our hostess, "I am afraid the after-acts of the play do not quite correspond to the first bright scenes. Poor Beppa! all that gay spirit has been quenched out of her life. She laughs very little, I am afraid, now."

"I am sorry to hear it," said the Marquis. "Pray tell me what has happened to her."

"She had her love-story—and a pretty one enough it was—and all seemed to go with her

'merry as a marriage-bell.' Her lover and husband was a strong handsome fellow, with no means except his stout arms; and with these he managed to support her—not well, of course, but sufficiently—for their wants were small, and they were fairly happy and contented. But, somehow or other, he did not get on well with the guards of the forest; and there was bad blood between them. So they tracked and watched him to catch him in some violation of the forest-laws, so as to put the hand of the law on him. Unfortunately, whether by mistake or not I cannot say, he took away some brushwood and dead branches of no sort of value, but which were within prohibited limits. He did not, however, take them for himself—he brought them to us, supposing that they were thrown away and useless; and this proves that he had no intention at least of stealing. But here was a chance for his enemies; and he was at once arrested and thrown into prison on an accusa-

tion of theft. My husband, on being informed of it,—what did you do? You know better than I."

"I went down to Figline, where the poor fellow was imprisoned, and did all that I could to free him from the imputation — declaring that I had known him and employed him even in matters of trust, and had found him scrupulously honest as far as I knew, and urged that the very fact of his not having taken the wood for himself was a clear proof that he did not intend to steal. I was fortunate enough to prevail, and he was set free."

"And not an hour too soon," said our hostess. "Poor Beppa, who was then close on her confinement, had wept her heart away during the month that he was in prison. She was alone with scarcely any means of subsistence. Her husband could earn nothing for her, and was besides under accusation of a crime which would probably be fatal to his and her future. She had four children to look after and support.

What could he or she do, even if he were liberated? It was a terrible blow. Two days after his return she gave birth to her fifth child."

"And now how is it with them?" said I.

"You shall see them to-morrow. Of course, since this affair all is dark with them. He can find no occupation here, and they all have to suffer."

So we went to see her in her wretched house. Suffering and privation and toil had made her old before her time. Remains of beauty certainly were there. The eyes and the teeth still were beautiful. But the face was haggard and thin, and very sad, and the joyousness and spring of life and youth utterly gone. Still the old sweet smile gleamed for moments over the face, and then faded into sadness again. One of her children was ill and in bed; the others, strong, nut-brown, with large lustrous eyes, stood beside her, shy, silent, half clothed,

but with no shadow of care upon their faces. We talked a little with her; and our hostess told her to come up to the house the next day, and she would give her something to keep her children warm for the winter. I gave them a few pennies meanwhile, and then we said good-bye. She thanked us, looked at us with a strange pathetic look, and then burst into tears.

The next day she came to us, with a girl, of about six years of age; and the two rosy, sunny-haired, blue-eyed children of my hostess, with their little arms full of thick stuffs for winter clothing, stood beside their mother, and each saying, "*A te,*" thrust them into the hands of the peasant girl, and then stood still and stared at her. She, shy and not knowing what to do, took them almost mechanically; but when her downcast eyes fell upon them, a flash of joyous light went over her face, but she said nothing. "Say *Grazie,*" said the mother,—"*grazie, signora; grazie, signorine.*" "*Grazie,*

signora," repeated the child, as if she were saying a lesson. "Hold up your head," said Beppa; "don't look down so and stick out your stomach, but look up." The little one lifted up her head a moment, and dropped it again. What she said when she got away and found her tongue, one can easily imagine; but there she was too shy to speak. It was a pretty picture, and a characteristic scene.

The next day another little one came—by request — and alone, to have a similar gift. This little maid, with eyes black as sloes, and thick tangled hair, of about seven, was as a little mother to the four younger children, and took care of them with a patience, intelligence, and sense of responsibility which was remarkable. It is only among the poor that such precocity is found; but here in Italy, duties and responsibilities and family cares are thrown upon young children at an age when among richer classes they would be thought too young to be left

alone. Here, however, they not only have to take care of themselves, but to look after their younger brothers and sisters—and this little maid was as serious and trustworthy almost as a grown woman. She gathered the chestnuts and brushwood; knew all the mushrooms that were edible, and where the strawberries and raspberries grew, and what she could take and what she must avoid; and kept all the little ones in order and out of danger, and carried them when they were tired, and soothed them when they cried, and assisted her mother in household affairs, and was, in a word, a little woman.

The Government is now building a road from Vallombrosa to unite it with the highroad leading from Pontassieve, and this during the summer has afforded work for the people in the vicinity. But suddenly, by order from headquarters, a stop was put to all this work a month

ago, and all the labourers were thrown out of employ, and the little wages they hoped to gain thereby to keep them comfortably through the winter are cut off, so that there is rather a dreary prospect before them. The wages paid here for a day's labour are only 1 franc, 20 centimes; but this satisfies them if it only continues, so that they can count upon it. But when they are cut off from this, their chances are poor enough. As this is the only employment given to them by Government for years (except in the case of the six forest-guards, who have a monthly pay), this sudden stoppage of work is disastrous to these poor people, who have few other means of earning a livelihood.

The Tuscan peasants, both men and women, are almost invariably dry, thin, and spare in their build—seldom becoming fat, as is the case with the Romans and Neapolitans, even among the peasantry—and not having the appearance of great vigour. But in fact they are capable of

much endurance; and though, like all Italians, rather indolent by temperament, and needing some spur to action, they are not only active and strong, but have great powers of resistance in their work. "Strong! I think so," said our host. "I will give you an example. Last year I bought of the Government five thousand pounds of charcoal, made by the charcoal-burners in the woods of Vallombrosa, about three miles from my house. Those I hired three men and two women to bring to me—over a rude and difficult path. Within six hours, during one of which they rested to take their mid-day meal and siesta, every stick of it was deposited in my cellar—all carried by them on their heads. The day was extremely hot—and you should have seen them as they came in, erect as masts and bearing their monstrous burdens aloft, and swinging along with a firm and even step down the rough slopes. One of these women in especial roused my admiration. She was a per-

fect gipsy in appearance, with ruled brows, black eyes, a wealth of wild tangled waving hair that strayed loosely over her shoulders, and a complexion dark enough in itself, but blackened to coal with the charcoal-dust which sifted over her; her arms and legs were bare; her eyes like fire; down her cheeks rolled great broad streams of sooty perspiration; and through her parted lips her white teeth almost shone as she came up panting and smiling. She was a striking creature in every way. With twenty baths of hot water and a clean fresh dress, instead of the worn, flimsy, and shabby rags which scarcely covered her, she would have made an impression anywhere, with her stately figure and her wild handsome face; but for me, I preferred her as she was, and I only wished I were an artist to paint her, with her charcoal burden, her clinging rags, her grimed face and arms, her bare feet, her streaming hair—all, in a word, just as she was."

The villagers of Raggioli and Tosi, and others in the vicinity, live entirely on what they gather in the woods during the summer and autumn. Before daybreak — by three in the midsummer mornings — they are up and off, with their baskets poised on their heads, their blùe and purple dresses, a red or party-coloured handkerchief drawn across their brows and knotted behind, and another folded Vandyke-wise over their shoulders. All day long they wander, and pluck the blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, mushrooms, or whatever the woods afford according to the season, and carry home at night their store, to be bought by dealers for the cities and large towns. These natural fruits of the soil the Government allows them to gather (except the chestnuts) free of tax; and as they are very abundant, and largely in demand, they thus gain a little money to support themselves.

A short distance above the monastery rises a steeply scarped rock, at one side of which pours down, roaring and foaming, the torrent of Vicano; and on the summit of this, 1027 metres above the sea and 70 metres above the monastery, stands the so-called Oratorio of the Paradisino. This was originally founded by Padre Biagio Milanese, General of the Order of the Benedictines, as a place of refuge, retirement, and discipline, to which those monks who had offended against the rules of the monastery, or who were under penance, self-inflicted or imposed upon them, retired from time to time, and there led a life more rigorous and disciplinary than the other monks. The prospect from here is wider and even more magnificent than that of the monastery below, overlooking the vast valleys and slopes from the chain of Etruscan mountains which rises against the horizon on the north, to the hills of Leghorn that skirt the Mediterranean. A steep and

rugged climb carries us to the summit, where the *celle* and church and tower stand. The church formerly contained some valuable pictures, among which may be mentioned one of Andrea del Sarto's finest works. But it is now despoiled of all its pictures and wood-carving, and is used as a magazine, barn, or hay-loft. The old mill, once driven by the Vicano, is still standing; but it is no longer used, as it was by the monks, to saw trees or to grind corn; nor are the *ghiacciaie*, or ice-basins, turned to any purpose.

Near the monastery is another low building called the Foresteria, which was built to receive women who came to visit the monastery. Originally, by the rules of the Vallombrosa order, no woman was allowed to enter the forest, or to pass within some large crosses erected at a distance of about a quarter of a mile. This rule was enforced for some eight centuries, but afterwards was relaxed; and the Foresteria was

built to afford lodging for female visitors. It is now used as an inn, and is crowded with visitors during the summer, who come to breathe the refreshing air, and to enjoy the prospect and the delightful walks which extend in every direction.

A four-miles walk down through the woods carries us to Paterno, which also formerly belonged to the monks and was attached to the monastery. Here originally stood a castle of the Counts Guidi, and was granted by them, with all the circumjacent land, at a very early period to San Giovanni and his brotherhood. Here came Otho III., weary of life and tormented with remorse for the cruel murder of Crescentius, to expiate his offence by penance; and here, according to some of the old chroniclers, he met his death, poisoned by Stephania, the widow of Crescentius, whom he had afterwards made his mistress. The castle was at a later period

turned into a monastery, and suffered many changes to adapt it to their use. At present it is a large, square, strong-built conventual edifice of stone, commanding a beautiful view, and surrounded by extensive grounds, and farms, and meadows. These were once admirably cultivated by the monks, and were covered with fields, vineyards, and olive-orchards, which yielded a large revenue, and supplied them abundantly with oil, wine, and grain. A good deal of oil (according to Vallisnieri) was also extracted from the beech-nuts; and Dr Giov. Targioni Tozzette has written three papers on this subject, urging that this oil is not only good for burning, but has very valuable medicinal properties. Besides this, the beech-nuts were largely used by the monks for food for their animals, and especially for their pigs, of which they had a large number.

Among the memories connected with this place is that of Gerbert, afterwards Sylvester II., the companion and friend of the first two Othos, and the preceptor of the young and brilliant Otho III., who here came to such an untimely end. The letters of Otho to Gerbert breathe the warmest affection and respect; and well was he deserving of it, both for the excellence of his character and his wonderful attainments. In any age he would have been a remarkable man, but in the darkness of this century he shines like a great light against the sombre background of its superstition and ignorance. Such was his superiority in point of learning to those by whom he was surrounded, that he was popularly supposed to have obtained his great knowledge at the expense of his soul, and to have been in league with the Evil One. He seems to have been an almost universal genius—distinguishing himself as a poet, a musician, a mathematician, a phy-

sician, an inventor in mechanics, and an author in various branches of science and literature, metaphysics, grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, theology, geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, and algebra; and besides all this, to have fulfilled with dignity and honour his functions as Pope, and to have been a peacemaker between the various and agitating factions of the day. Among his inventions were a hydraulic organ, in which the amount of air necessary to produce the sound was effected by steam; and a famous celestial sphere and solar clock. He is also supposed by some writers to have invented the first clock which went with wheels, and the method of escapement. This is, however, doubtful; and the better opinion seems to be that we owe this to the Archdeacon Pacifico in the ninth century. However this may be, he improved certainly upon it, and has the reputation of being the first who made a clock to strike the hours. He first introduced into Europe the use

of the Arabic numerals, and the decimal system. His treatise on geometry is clear and precise; he was a good Greek scholar, and a master of the Latin language, in which he wrote various poems; he was also an admirable musician, and a composer, among other things, of *cantici spirituali*, some of which are still preserved among the monuments of the Liturgy for their beauty.

Here at Paterno he often came—in company with Otho his pupil, and alone—and here he presided over a famous synod to compose the differences between Welligiso di Magonza and Bernward of Hildesheim as to their jurisdiction over the convent of nuns at Hildesheim. Among the other famous figures might then be seen here the noble Abbess Gerberga, sister of Otho II., then old and inform, who warmly espoused the cause of Bernward; and her rival and niece Sophia, the eldest sister of Otho III., proud and ambitious, and daily acquiring influence, who took vehemently the part of Welligiso. Earnest

almost to fierceness were the passionate debates that there took place, and it needed all the influence of Gerbert to prevent an open outbreak: even as it was, the synod was forced to adjourn without composing the quarrel.

But among the memories which, in passing, we may recall in this old and honoured monastery, we must not omit the wonderful figure of Stephania, the widow of Crescentius, magnificent in her beauty, and terrible in her revenge, who flashes across the scene, captivates the heart of Otho, slays him in her fury at the defeat of her ambition, and vanishes out of history from that moment. According to some writers, especially of Henrion, her revenge was not satiated even by the death of Otho, but struck also at Gerbert himself, whom, at least, she was suspected of having poisoned. In this, however, there seems to be little ground of belief.[1]

[1] Otho is said by the greater part of the chroniclers of his time to have met his death in Paterno—"oppidum quod nuncupatur Paternum non longe a civitate quæ dicitur Castellana,"

As Paterno was much lower, and the temperature far milder than that of Vallombrosa, the monks were in the habit of passing the colder winter months here, and returning on the approach of spring to Vallombrosa. This ancient custom is still kept up by the professors, and students, and others attached to the Forestal School, by which the monastery is now occupied.

All the forests of Vallombrosa, as well as the farms and vineyards both there and at Paterno, were most admirably planted and cultivated by the monks. In the opinion of M. Adolfo de Bérenger—and no one is more capable of giving a competent judgment on this subject, to which

says Leo Ostiensis. So also Cosimo della Rena; but he thinks Paterno is situated about a day's journey from Todi, in the Contado di Perugia. There is no place of that name at present near Perugia, Todi, or Civita Castellana; and for many reasons it seems most probable that it was here at this Paterno, near Tosi and Pelago, that he performed his penances, and finally was poisoned.

he has given a careful study—their forests were "modelle de coltura forestale, perche tutti piantati ad arte per filari e d'una produttività e rendita giunta al di là d'ogni credere, quantunque radicate sopra falde ertissime ed in un suolo dirupatissimo e Sassoso." Soldani also, in his 'Guida storica per il viaggio alla Valleombrosa,' comparing the condition of the priests in other parts of Italy with those of Vallombrosa, points to the latter as examples of admirable cultivation, worthy to be followed; and after urging upon the Government the necessity of preserving the forests of Italy from the ruin and destruction to which they were elsewhere exposed, says,—"I shall never rest content until I see the preservation of the forests taken in hand by the supreme power of the Government. Among the means which, in my opinion, are most sure to preserve the forests on the high mountains, are those certainly which I know by experience to have been used in the province of Casentino

by the three monasteries of Vallombrosa, Alvernia, and Camaldoli."

As cultivators of the land, monastic bodies especially distinguished themselves, and during the middle ages they did as good service to agriculture as to literature and science. "We owe," says Hallam ('Middle Ages,' vol. iii. p. 361), "the agricultural restoration of great part of Europe to the monks. They chose, for the sake of retirement, secluded regions, which they cultivated with the labour of their hands. Many of the grants to monasteries, which strike us as enormous, were of districts absolutely wasted, which would probably have been reclaimed by no other means." Both Hallam and Guizot agree that it was the glory of St Benedict's reform that he substituted bodily labour for the supine indolence of oriental asceticism. "The Benedictines," says Guizot, "have been the great clearers of land in Europe;" "as missionaries and labourers they accomplished

their double service through peril and fatigue." Nor were the Benedictines at Vallombrosa exceptions to the rule. It is to them we owe the plantation and cultivation of all these magnificent forests, and the admirable farming of all this tract of country.

The Government has now possessed itself of these forests; and the monastery itself has been turned into a "Collegio Forestale," professedly for the education of young men in matters relating to agriculture. There are thirteen professors, and only twelve scholars, in this large building. It is presided over by a director, an excellent and intelligent man, who has his suite of apartments, and lives here during the warm seasons. In the winter neither he nor the professors nor scholars remain; and the building is occupied by three priests, also excellent men, and a few subsidiaries, whose amusement it seems to be to taunt the priests with

the loss of the monastery, and the change that liberty and unity have brought to them. Padre Furio showed us over all the building with great kindness; and, when I ventured to express my surprise at certain things, thrust out his lips and put his forefinger across them, to intimate that I might by any criticism compromise him as well as myself. So I kept silence.

Upon the establishment of the Forestal School at Vallombrosa, Signor de Bérenger was appointed director—and to no fitter hands could this office have been intrusted. During his short rule his administration of the woods was admirable. But he was not supported by the Government, and the administration has now passed into other hands. This is greatly to be regretted. Where the fault is I cannot say, but the fact is clear that little interest is shown in the matter; and the cultivation and maintenance of the forests, as well as the establishment of proper

nurseries or replantation, is not what it should be, and not as it was in the time of the monks.[1] As far as is apparent, no advantage has been derived to any one by the violent sequestration and assumption of this property by the Government.

The church is not handsome architecturally, and there are few objects of interest now remaining. From a priestly point of view, the most interesting is an elaborately carved and chiselled reliquary in silver, adorned with gems, and containing the relics of San Giovanni Gualberto. In it is a brown bone, of about a foot in length, which is looked upon with reverence, and kept with great care. I do not know whether it works miracles, and I did not care to ask.

[1] M. de Bérenger has written an admirable and practical little book, entitled 'Guida per Il coltivatore dei Vivai Boschivi,' to which the reader who is interested in the question is referred.

Among the pictures which were taken from the church, Fontani specially mentions the celebrated picture by Pietro Perugino, now in the academy at Florence, which formerly stood in the choir. There still remains an Assumption by Franceschini, and a much injured Sabbatelli in the sacristy. The cupola is painted by Fabbrini.

There is a grand old kitchen which interested me more, and in which there were savoury odours, showing that whatever else is lost, the art of cooking is not. Here in the centre is a large circular sort of hypæthral temple—I know not what else to call it—with stone pillars and roof, from the centre of which hangs a turnspit, carried by water-power, on which an ox might be roasted whole,—a temple once dedicated to the Genius of Hospitality and Charity, where culinary service is still performed, though on a much smaller scale, and where, though the hierophants are not monks or priests, the odours

of sacrifice still rise gratefully. There is also a fine old refectory (a refectory no longer), where the brothers used to take their meals, with its reading-desk or pulpit midway on the wall above. Here, with a shudder, said Padre Furio, a ball was given a short time ago.

But change has come over almost everything. The cells of the monks are now the rooms for the students and professors. The chapel is the fencing-school. The pictures of saints on the walls have given place to crossed swords and foils. It is the epoch of equal rights (except for monks and nuns) and of union (God save the mark! with all the old jealousies and rivalries as alive as ever, and an *octroi* at the gate of every city); of constitutional government (with almost unendurable taxation); of popular representation (the representatives agreeing in nothing but the selfish advantage of each member); of liberty (with party strife and struggle for power, and industry vainly struggling under the weight of imposts).

So let us shout "*Viva la Libertà e l'Unità!*" while the people only shrug their shoulders and cry "*Pazienza!*" as burden after burden is laid on them. Words are great powers. One knows a people by its watch-words. I am tired of hearing in Italy that cry of slaves, "*Pazienza!*" I am waiting to hear that cry of freemen—"*Coraggio—avanti!*"

But a truce to politics. Whatever change has taken place here at Vallombrosa, nature is still the same. There is the vast panorama of hills and valleys just as it was when Milton gazed upon it—ay, just as it was when San Giovanni Gualberto toiled with weary steps up those wooded slopes. The same torrent and fountain that cooled his parched lips may now cool ours; the same deep shadows lurk under the sombre firs; autumn still strews the sward and heaps the brooks with the same wealth of golden leaves torn from the chestnuts; the same

flowers smile up to us from the grass; the same tender blue sky bends over us like a benediction; and, in despite all changes and in defiance of all politics, we still can have our hour of peace and meditation and delight—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot"—along the lovely slopes of Vallombrosa.

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